



**Citizen's Network on Election Monitoring  
and Democratic Rights in Indonesia:  
Komite Independen Pemantau Pemilu  
(KIPP)**

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## **Abstract**

In 1996, the pioneer citizen's election monitoring network, *Komite Independen Pemantau Pemilu* (KIPP) or Committee for Independent Election Monitoring, emerged in Indonesia with the aim of monitoring the government's manipulated elections and raising questions to the legitimacy of the fully controlled elections under the Soeharto government. After the transition to the Reform Era, the political reform was mainly done from a top-down approach through legal and institutional reform, while the role of citizen's election monitoring became weakened. However, is citizen's engagement in checks and balances system, as a bottom-up approach, still needed in the current era? Through interviews with key informants of former founders, key members of KIPP and electoral experts, the research identifies a few aspects of the needs to maintain such a network to strengthen and maintain the citizen's role in monitoring elections and providing civic/voter education in Indonesia. I argue that even in the democratic environment, in which democratic mechanisms have been put in place, the elections should still be monitored by the citizens as a part of the public's long-term civic education, and public participation in political processes. This research enables us to see a necessity of rethinking the necessity of citizens' role in consolidating democracy, not just by being informed voters, but also by engaging in political processes at the local level, and supporting the work of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) through providing their reflections and findings to improve the quality of the country's democracy.

**Keywords:** civil society, election monitoring, social networking, KIPP, Indonesia

## **Introduction**

Indonesia underwent the New Order Era of Soeharto's presidency for 31 years since 1967. The repressive regime's widespread intimidation of human rights and severe restriction of public participation in politics in order to pave the way for continuous of the military rule have brought the civil society groups, human rights activist groups, and activist students to realize the need of changing their strategy to topple down the regime. They could not use the old strategies of street protests and boycotting elections, but needed to form a countrywide network of citizen's election monitoring groups by using lessons from the Philippines and the civil movement to monitor elections. Until 1996, KIPP was founded by activists from various fields, namely human rights activists, media activists, student activists, labor and peasant activists. The movement encountered many challenges and

intimidation from the military regime, but still managed to prove the flaws and questioned the legitimacy of the military-manipulated elections, leading to the fall of Soeharto in 1998.

After the transition of the government to the Reformation Era in 1999, the political environment became much more open and elections became more democratic. The civilian-led government then reformed the law and loosened the restriction of human rights and citizenry rights as well as increased public participation in politics and elections at the policy making level. On the one hand, this situation allowed the bloom of NGOs and activists to work on various human rights issues, but on the other hand, the public interest as well as the international donors' interest on election monitoring has been reduced. This became a lesson that the Indonesian society has lost its opportunity to continue the engagement and participation of the citizens in consolidating and strengthening democracy. It led to the question of whether the bottom-up approach of maintaining broad citizen's engagement in the checks and balances system, in this case through election monitoring by KIPP, is needed in the current era.

By using documentary research and conducting in-depth interviews with KIPP's founders, former and current members, as well as electoral experts and EMBs, the findings show how such a nation-wide network was formed based on the connections and network of activists prior to the formation of KIPP and shared a common aim of challenging the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime. This paper shows the ways in which the network of members contributed towards Indonesian's democracy, the challenges of maintaining the network in the current context and the needs of continuing the support for the existence of such activity and engagement of the citizens.

Even though some key informants expressed that the network should adapt its way of work or reform itself to be research-based organization or that the citizen's role of election monitoring is no longer needed in Indonesian current context, the researcher would still argue that the role of election monitoring should not be left alone to the EMBs (BAWASLU in the Indonesian context), but that civil society organizations and participation of the public in the political processes, such as election monitoring and providing civic education, are still required. Even though the level of democracy index shows that Indonesia has become one of the leading democratic country in Southeast Asia, we must not forget that democratization and the consolidation of democracy are an ongoing process, and therefore, the engagement of the people in democratic activities should still be emphasized.

The paper is organized into 4 sections. It begins with 1) the rise of civil society for a democratic movement to provide an overview of the civil society's attempts to call for democracy during the military rule of Soeharto; 2) the KIPP network building and its challenges under the Soeharto regime; 3) continuing challenges after the Reformation Era to sustain its capacity and engagement in political and electoral processes; and 4) rethinking civic engagement in the consolidation of democracy to reconsider whether Indonesia should still pay attention to a development of democracy from a bottom-up approach of broad-based civic engagement in the political processes.

The researcher argues that even though Indonesia has put effective democratic mechanisms and institutions in place, however, the needs of having citizens' active engagement in politics and elections should not be overlooked. As the consolidation of democracy cannot only be done in a top-down approach by the policy makers, it also requires the continuation of active participation of the people from the bottom-up approach. If the government and the EMBs fail to address this issue, the further backsliding of Indonesian democracy might be witnessed in the coming years.

## **Research Methods**

This research was mainly conducted by using documentary research in order to understand the political situation prior to the formation of KIPP and the factors that made civil society organizations and activist groups change their strategy to election monitoring. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with former founders, former and current members of KIPP, electoral experts and Indonesian EMBs. Moreover, non-structured interviews were conducted with some non-KIPP members who participated in election monitoring activities during 1997-1999 as a part of the extended network, in order to take notes of their perceptions towards such a strategy and their opinion on the current situation.

Due to the scattered existence of KIPP chapters, the researcher was able to reach the key persons, including KIPP founders and former and current members, through recommendations from the current members. During the time of the field research in Indonesia during February-May 2018, the interviews were carried out with the KIPP headquarters in Jakarta, as well as with current members of local chapters in North Sumatera and East Java and former active members in Yogyakarta, Semarang

in Central Java, Surabaya in East Java, and West Berlin (KIPP overseas chapter in Germany). Moreover, non-structured interviews were done with some former individual volunteers and members of the extended student network that volunteered with KIPP to provide civic education during 1996-1999.

The researcher was often asked why we should study KIPP network at this time after two decades have passed and Indonesia is now recognized as a democratic country. The researcher hopes that this study will provide some insights that could be reassessed by the related stakeholders in Indonesia and by civil society groups still striving for their political and electoral rights under the authoritarian military rule, while foreseeing challenges which may lay ahead.

### **1. Rise of Civil Society for the Democratic Movement**

Throughout the repressive control under Soeharto or the *Order Baru* (New Order era) in 1967-1998, the elections have been controlled and gave legitimacy to the military government to continue their ruling power. The civil society did many attempts to challenge the regime and call for the end of the military-backed regime. Their strategies varied from contentious politics such as street demonstrations, boycotting elections, to using alternative art forms, literatures, music, and poetry reading, among others. Many strategies were developed and anti-Soeharto networks were also growing while the demand of democracy and fair elections became more and more intensified as time passed.

Since Soeharto stepped into power in 1967 until the last election of his rule in 1997, symbolic elections (United Nations Development Program, 2011: 15) or what Schiller calls “fiction” (Schiller, 1999: 3) were held every five years with full control to fabricate public approval. Even though there was no mass vote rigging, constant violent crackdown on the opposition groups during every electoral cycle was carried out, while the fusing of political parties into two major parties apart from the ruling functional group “*Golongan Karya*” (*Golkar*) and other systematic electoral frauds were done by the military regime (Langenberg, 1990: 131). Schiller (1999: 5-6) argues that the high turnout of voters and the compliance with the government’s election ritual were high because of the high personal risk and costs the electorates may face if they seemed to be or were caught opposing the government’s order.

Voting became the only chance for citizens’ political participation because of the “floating mass” concept, an idea popularized by Ali Moertopo, a military general during Soeharto rule, to make citizens

apolitical or depoliticized by limiting political activities, causing greater distance between the public and politics (Moertopo, 1982: 97 cited in Eklöf, 2003: 54). However, the civil society movement and student networks that were formed to contest the regime have shown the demand for civic engagement in politics.

Many studies and literatures portrayed and discussed how the New Order government, through laws and the Constitution, abused its power and legitimized its control over the civil society and the whole political sphere. However, it is important to look at the roles and experience of the civil society groups, as they were one of the main pillars and actors in the struggle for political reform despite the government's severe control and intimidation. Even though they may not be the only factor that brought the change, their roles in political and human rights advocacy were quite significant. But because of the repressive regime which resulted in a fractured and scattered social movement, little about them has been documented.

The movement of civil society in Indonesia, if not only counting the political movement, could be traced back since before Indonesia was colonized by the Western country (Lee, 2010: 36). The significance of enthusiasm in the social engagement in the social and political sphere has been remarked by Max Lane (2007), a well-known researcher, writer, and translator with long experience in Indonesian politics, who mentioned in one of his writings, and also stated at the 20<sup>th</sup> year commemoration event of 1998 student mass movement at *Universitas Gadjah Mada* in Yogyakarta in May 2018, that "Indonesia was one of the most mobilized and most party political countries in the world in the '50s and the early '60s".

Student movements, which played an important role in Indonesian political history even before the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence and the student movement during the *Orde Lama* (Old Order) in 1945-1965, portrayed the citizens' thirst for political participation and the struggle for the distribution of power (Onanong, 2014: 255-296). Lee (2010: 58), however, explained that though it was a promising period for the development of the civil society, it was impeded by political and economic crisis that resulted in polarization and organizations mainly supporting major political parties.

Despite factions and polarization among the public and civil society groups, if we look at social capital, it is an element that is needed in civic community. As described by Robert Putnam, both economic development and effective democracy would need voluntary cooperation, which is facilitated by interpersonal trust and norms of reciprocity, in order to pool resources, exchange, and organize for common goals (cited in Diamond, 1997: 12). Mario Diani (1997) defined social capital as “ties that are based on mutual trust and mutual recognition among the actors involved in the relationship, although they do not necessarily imply the presence of collective identity”. In the Indonesian case, during the repressive regime where the political movement was pushed to stay underground, building a mutual trust, a common goal and networking became necessary to raise common awareness and increase civic engagement to topple down the authoritative regime.

Similar to the civil society movement for democracy in the Philippines, during the regime of Marcos, “the brutality of the regime drew strong opposition from variety social groups and movements” (Somchai, 2014; 259), and while in Ukraine, the case of ‘PORA’, a civic campaign and youth movement to guarantee fair and free elections in 2004, was a result of the social capital of the civil society groups which actively organized under the repressive government (see Polese, 2009). In Indonesia, the civil society also adapted their strategies and organized themselves informally along the tactics and suppression of the Soeharto regime while waiting for the opportunity to re-emerge.

Even though the civil society groups in Indonesia were fractured along the ideological, religious and class lines, they still sustained and expanded their movement and groups in order to challenge state power. The government’s strong control and intimidation towards the civil society through direct and indirect means could not bar the civil society from demanding for their civil rights and political participation.

After the crackdown and massacre of the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI- Communist Party of Indonesian) and its network during 1965-1966, the government’s prohibition and threats against the dissident organizations have resulted in scattered and underground small-scale movements which were not well documented (Boudreau, 2004 :104). During the *Orde Baru* era, the systematic and structural control from the government through the implementation of *Undang-undang Organisasi Kemasyarakatan* or ORMAS (Law on Social Organizations) in 1985 (Eldridge, 1990: 510), Constitution, and various discourses resulted in a weak civil society movement.

However, the civil society movement started to intensify during the 1970s due to factions among the power holders and the decline in power of Soeharto. However, because of the risk of being exposed or openly organized, NGOs kept their movement to small-scale activities that would not seem to mobilize mass movement (Boudreau, 2004: 122-123) while focusing their issues around community development programs, non-formal education, and legal aid (Eldridge, 1990: 506-507). The movement emerged in forms of community development, human rights and legal aid organizations. As Eldridge (1990: 515-527) has categorized Indonesian civil society movement into 3 main categories, namely 1) high level partnership: grassroots development, 2) high level politics: grassroots mobilization and 3) empowerment at the grassroots. However, organizations under these 3 categories built loose networks with one another not only for resource mobilization, but also to avoid the control from the government under the ORMAS law.

Students and extra-university student networks which were founded since 1940s-50s to support different political ideologies and political parties (Onanong, 2014: 266-269) became the major actors in the political movement. During the late 1960s to 1990s, Indonesia witnessed several student-organized street protests on price hikes, unfair elections, corruption, movement anniversaries or critiques of government programs, such as “*Taman Mini*” protests in 1971 (which later led to formation of a loose network called “Cipayung”<sup>1</sup> comprising of 5 main extra-university student networks) and the Malari riots in 1974. Major student protest movements and rallies in the wake of parliamentary elections that would bring back Soeharto to ruling power emerged before and during election year in 1977-1978. While in 1971, the “*Golongan Putih*” or *golput* (White Group)<sup>2</sup> idea to boycott the elections emerged, it could not significantly impact the result of elections as in the 1982 elections. As an estimation, *golput* only comprised of about 10% of total number of eligible voters (see Suayadinata,

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<sup>1</sup> *Cipayung*, founded on 22 January 1972, comprises of *Gerakan Mahasiswa Kristen Indonesia* (GMKI- Indonesian Christian Student Movement), *Gerakan Mahasiswa Nasional Indonesia* (GMNI- Indonesian National Student Movement), *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* (HMI- Islamic Student Association), *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia* (PMII- Indonesian Islamic Student Movement, and *Perhimpunan Mahasiswa Katolik Republik Indonesia* (PMKRI- Catholic Student Association of the Republic of Indonesia) in order to unify student networks while raising awareness and concerns among the students on improvement of justice, democracy and the socio-political issues during the Soeharto regime. (<https://gmkibengkulublog.wordpress.com/2017/11/13/sejarah-terbentuknya-kelompok-cipayung/>. Retrieved on 26 June, 2018)

<sup>2</sup> The emergence of *Golput* indicated the beginning of student resistance towards to Soeharto regime in order to oppose the Soeharto’s illegitimate rule of government. The idea was initiated by prominent student activists from University of Indonesia such as Arief Budiman, Adnan Buyung Nasution, Imam Waluyo, Husni Umar, Asmara Nababan (Onanong, 2014: 183)



1982: 47) however, this idea was mostly practiced by anti-Soeharto regime activists until 1998. After the rise of civil resistance against the regime, in order to legitimize the crackdown and prohibition of these political movements, the government, especially the *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* (ABRI-Armed Forces of Republic of Indonesia), frequently linked the protests to the *golput* electoral boycott, and both to the PKI (Boudreau, 2004:111-112).

After a series of student protests and rallies, the government implemented a policy known as the Normalization of Campus Life (*Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus- NKK*) and Campus Coordination Body (*Badan Koordinasi Kampus-BKK*) in 1979 prohibiting political expression and activities in the university campuses; “universities then became important sites for military intelligence operations...campus based ‘Student Regiments’ increasingly served as an on-campus intelligence network to monitor the activity of other students” (Beerkens, 2008).

As a result, student activists had to reassess their tactics and developed strategies and means to challenge the regime. Most turned to fragmented “study groups” as informal political discussions on political theories among the students, publishing student press for circulating information and the means to stay in contact with activists in exile. Tactics also included working with local communities, urban poor or labour groups on rights issues (Bhakti, 1999: 172-173; Bunnell, 1996: 181-182; Kohno, 2003: 168) and underground mobilization such as *Solidaritas Mahasiswa Indonesia untuk Demokrasi* (SMID- Indonesian Student Solidarity for Democracy), founded in late 1993 (Interview, Yul Amrozi, 5 April 2018, Jakarta), and *Utan Kayu*, an underground community focusing on art, literature and student journalism for the democratic movement (Interview Goenawan Mohamad, 14 April 2018, Jakarta).

By organizing off-campus study groups, there was a turn to publication and the production of student newspapers to criticize state policy and working with NGOs (Boudreau, 2004: 111; Aspinall, 2005: 121-122). These activities became a link between students and academics, progressive press and journalists, as well as former democratic activists and established organizations such as *Lembaga Bantuan Hukum* or LBH (Legal Aid Institution). For instance, a student network in Yogyakarta, Salatiga and Surabaya had developed connection and trust with the local people while working on the land rights and peasant rights issue; an organization like LHB had to cooperate with the student network

in order to gain trust from the communities to work on legal aid, demonstration or meetings with the villagers (Kohno, 2003: 170).

Indonesian diasporas which conducted the political movement from abroad, such as *Perbimpunan Pelajar Indonesian* or PPI (Indonesian Student Association) in Europe, especially in West Berlin, Germany, also played an important role in challenging its government by various political activities, especially its straightforward criticism towards the Soeharto regime on its human rights violations in East Timor (see Hasyim, 2014). “Since 1978, the activities of West Berlin activists started to be known by the Indonesians” (Interview, Pipit Rochijat Kartawidjaja, 18 February 2018, Jakarta). Their demonstration during Soeharto’s visit to Germany in 1995 and the invitation of Sri Bintang Pamungkas, a public intellectual and an opposition figure to the Soeharto regime, to lecture on Indonesian politics in Germany was reported in Indonesian newspapers and had “influenced protest movement at home” (Hasyim, 2014).

In addition to the experience of network mobilization, the role of network and personal contacts played a significant role during the authoritarian regime because political activists had a big risk to lose their lives if they moved individually or became too exposed to the public. While having few identities for activists, it helped them to maintain their opportunities for other political activities, share resources and information, or regenerate new members or cadres and ideas for the movement.

## **2. KIPP network building and its challenges under the repressive regime**

The citizen election monitoring network of KIPP, officially founded in 1996, was the pioneer country-wide citizen’s network which monitored elections, and was considered to be “the high point of NGO political ambition” (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2008: 20). KIPP became a political platform for anti-Soeharto regime activists from the broad political spectrum, namely liberal academics, human rights activists, labour activists, journalists, various religious leaders, extra-campus student networks, as well as politicians, to challenge the legitimacy of the elections held under the Soeharto government.

### KIPP Network Building

The spirit of activism could not be built in a short period of time. Most people who joined KIPP during the early years (1996-1999) had been active in political activism, either in extra-campus student networks or various interest groups. The loose civil society network existed prior to KIPP formation, and drew lessons from democratic movement in the Philippines during the 1980s. Their need to demand a power distribution from the authoritarian government facilitated them to build new connections, find new movement strategies, mobilize resources and recognition, and quickly promote the idea of citizen's election monitoring under KIPP.

Since the democratic activists realized the lessons from previous civil movement strategies which were concentrated around street protests and campaigns by small groups of activists, the major problem was how to stop the continuation of Soeharto's ruling power. They concluded that challenging the elections should be the key solution.

The problem of Indonesian politics was the controlled elections and there was no possibility to make any change through the formal means or from 'inside the political system' such as through political parties or demanding policy change, therefore, another way to fight with the regime is through the "informal" means or outside the system. That's why the idea of forming a non-partisan citizen's election monitoring group as a new tactic to challenge the upcoming 1997 elections. (Interview, Budiman Sudjatmiko, 9 May, 2018, Jakarta)

The original idea of citizen's election monitoring was influenced by the Philippines' National Citizen's Movement for Free and Fair Elections (NAMFREL) to monitor the 1986 snap elections under President Ferdinand Marcos. Before the idea of citizen's election monitoring inspired Indonesian activists to form one in Indonesia, NAMFREL also inspired Bangladesh and Thailand to form their own networks in those respective countries. In Indonesia, Rustam Ibrahim, then the director of a research organization, LP3ES (*Lembaga Penelitian, Pendidikan dan Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial*, or Institute for Social and Economic Research, Education and Information) participated in a conference with domestic election-monitoring activists from different parts of Asia, which was held in Manila, the Philippines. He then introduced the concept of domestic election monitoring to the Indonesian civil society after his return in February 1995 (Bjornlund, 2004: 258-259), two years before the sixth election under the rule of Soeharto in 1997.

In fact, the researcher found that the idea of monitoring election and active engagement in politics was initiated and proposed to many civil society groups by Yogyakarta-based PRD students since 1993. However, it did not gain much response due to the fear of being seen as a leftist movement group by the government (Interview, Yul Amrozi, 5 April 2018, Jakarta)

In a manner different from the NAMFREL experience in the Philippines, the business community and the network of churches became strong base support for the movement. By having strong financial support from the business community and member mobilization from the church network, NAMFREL membership shot up very quickly and firmly. In 1984, prior to the election in 1986, NAMFREL could even carry out its first lobby activity for electoral reform (Iskandar & Khoo, 2013: 5-6).

Even though such tactics have been used in a few other countries in Asia before it was introduced to Indonesian activists, the formation of such a network requires time and other factors such as capacity, resources, as well as the costly and high risk under the Soeharto regime. Moreover, the idea of citizen's election monitoring was new so it took several months for the idea to be accepted and agreed by other activist groups.

At the time, *Persatuan Rakyat Demokrasi*<sup>3</sup> (PRD- People's Democratic Union), a Yogyakarta-based socialist student network, which eventually became *Partai Rakyat Demokrasi* (PRD) in 1996, was one of the first underground groups that discussed the need of having a consolidation of activists across the country under a common value of democracy and to monitor elections. "Idea of KIPP formation started in December, 1995 at Puncak, Bogor... it was attended by 20 people from various civil society organizations" (GATRA, 1996).

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<sup>3</sup> Launched in 1994, this student network was started by a faction of radical element in student movement started in Yogyakarta and grew rapidly to Solo, Semarang, Surabaya, Jakarta, and outside of Java. Its declaration called for "democratization in political, economic, and cultural fields and demanded the free formation of parties, abolition of the military's political role, full restitution of the rights of former political prisoners, and a peaceful and democratic resolution of the East Timor problem" (Aspinall, 2005: 130). Later when PRD declared its change of status from "*persatuan*" (union) to "*partai*" (party), the members and its affiliates were alleged by army to be the "new PKI" and for masterminding the riot supporting the opposition party PDI. This led a country-wide arrests and disappearance of many PRD affiliated members in 1996 and 1998 (Human Rights Watch, 1996; Interview, Yul Amrozi, Jakarta, 5 April, 18).

According to Budiman Sudjatmiko, former PRD leader and currently a member of the House of Representatives (DPR) from PDI-Perjuangan Party, the PRD tried to convince public figures, academics, journalists, and people from different religious groups to join the movement. Because the democracy movement and civil society groups were very scattered, and the dynamics among activists were broad, they concluded that “there must be a common political platform to oppose the military regime” (Interview, Budiman Sudjatmiko, 9 May 2018, Jakarta). By having people from different political spectrums, it helped the movement to gain more legitimacy to challenge the government and to increase its reputation and trust among the public.

After the idea of forming KIPP was quite settled, the PRD, as an experienced underground student movement network, became one of the main mechanisms that built up connections with other existing student and activist networks, such as the intra-campus student network *Cipayung*, LBH, labour movement, for instance. At the same time, the public figures such as Mulyana W. Kusumah, the criminologist and former director of LBH, Goenawan Mohamad, a founder and former editor of weekly news magazine *Tempo*, which was banned by the government in 1994, Arief Budiman, one of *golput*<sup>4</sup> initiators, also worked on promoting the idea of a citizen network for election monitoring and forming network groups at the local level by visiting student groups and activist organizations throughout the country.

KIPP had its formal declaration on 15 March 1996. The name KIPP, which stands for *Komite Independen Pemantau Pemilu*, sounds similar to the English word “keep” as if to keep or to care for democracy (Interview, Alois Wisnuhardana, 3 April 2018, Jakarta). Schiller (1999: 9) remarks, “the creation of KIPP was itself a challenge of the government’s control over how the election process would be seen at home and abroad.”

Mulyana W. Kusumah became KIPP’s secretary general while Goenawan Mohamad became KIPP Chairman. Because of Mulyana W. Kusumah’s position in LBH, the local LBH offices at the local level became the meeting and training places for KIPP activists and young people. While Goenawan Mohamad had been continuously active in advocacy at the local places after the ban of *Tempo*, it helped

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<sup>4</sup> Golput or *Golongan Putih* which means White Group, emerged in 1971, is a movement to boycott the elections which was practiced by a small group of anti-Soeharto activists. In 1982 election, as an estimation, *golput* only comprised of about 10% of total number of eligible voters (see Suayadinata, 1982: 47). This idea was mostly practiced by anti-Soeharto regime activists until 1998.

him to be able to build connections with many local pro-democracy student groups. However, because of Goenawan Mohamad's commitment and preference to nurture underground movement through art and literature, he decided to decrease his visibility in KIPP and resigned from his position after 6 months (Interview, Goenawan Mohamad, 14 April 2018, Jakarta). As Porta and Diani (2006) pointed out, mobilization in social movements was frequently done by recruiting cells, branches, or significant groups of members of existing organizations or "bloc recruitment" to form a new movement. In the case of KIPP, such a method was partly utilized.

After KIPP's official formation in 1996, among the former and current KIPP members, most of them had affiliations with one of the extra-campus student networks. A part of them joined KIPP under the student network affiliation as a group, while some joined under individual choice to be identified as KIPP. Being a KIPP member also emphasized the ideology and identity of democratic activists. In East Java, for instance, the regional GMNI network branch decided to establish the KIPP East Java group. However, KIPP did not only apply bloc recruitment in its network, but also through personal recruitments and individual memberships, as well as personal recommendations or connections in order to check personal backgrounds and reliability (Interview, Jojo Rohi, 9 March 2018, Jakarta).

In fact, KIPP, was not merely a straightforward non-partisan election monitoring group that enabled the Indonesian public to pay attention and monitor the government's actions. At the same time, the idea was also used to consolidate anti-Soeharto regime activists and normalize the radical movement's identity which the democratic activists were involved with in the past. It also was used to gain broader participation from the more neutral or right-leaning activists and politicians and greater support from the public. It was expected to be a political platform for all groups calling for democracy, including the non-radical ones.

Even though there was a debate among activists whether *golput* idea would still be applicable, I think (KIPP) was probably one of the best ways to mobilize activists from different interest groups... At the beginning, KIPP was to become a "propaganda war". Because Soeharto's government used the discourse of elections to hold fake elections, so, we came up with a way to contest their discourse by forming an election monitoring network. Our monitoring was to create worry and annoyance to the government. But in fact, behind the network, it was like a political space for activists

who wanted to topple down the regime. (Interview, Goenawan Mohamad, 14 April, 2018, Jakarta)

However, it did not mean that the old anti-election strategy would be abandoned. As the backdrop of its movement, some local chapters still maintained their *golput* campaign alongside the monitoring activities during the election in 1997. For instance, in KIPP East Java, while the activities focused around the production of brochures and pamphlets to advocate on elections and electoral frauds, the members also advocated the *golput* idea to boycott the elections (Interview, Jojo Rohi, 9 March 2018, Jakarta). “Only after 1999 when the elections became more open and political parties gained equal playing field, KIPP shifted its advocacy to freedom of choice and free and fair elections.” (Interview, Wandy Nicodemus Tuturoong, 5 April 2018, Jakarta). In contrast, Yul Amrozi, a former PRD activist and one of the key persons in KIPP formation in Yogyakarta, chose the formal political change through elections and political parties, and disagreed with *golput*: “we need political changes. We need to vote for PDI” (Interview, Yul Amrozi, 5 April 2018, Jakarta).

KIPP, however, did not only receive attention from civil society groups inside Indonesia, but also from Indonesian activists abroad. During the same year KIPP was founded in Indonesia, Pipit Rochijat Kartawidjaja, a member of the Germany-based Indonesian Student Association (*PPI-Perhimpunan Pelajar Indonesian*) and prominent anti-Soeharto regime activist in West Berlin, contacted KIPP Indonesian through Mulyana W. Kusumah. The Indonesian activists residing in Europe agreed to form the KIPP Europe Chapter on 11 May 1996, and then later on, KIPP Berlin Chapter was founded on 11 April 1999. KIPP Chapters in Europe organized discussions, trainings on elections and political ideologies, as well as producing civic education materials and manuals for election monitoring for Indonesian students residing abroad (Interview, Pipit Rochijat Kartawidjaja, 18 February 2018, Jakarta).

Due to lack of proper documentation, the number of KIPP volunteers who observed the election in 1997 is said to vary from between 9,000-12,000 volunteers in 40-47 established regional groups in 16 provinces across the country (Schiller, 1999: 9; Mitsuru, 2012). The three main factors that contributed to the speedy expansion of KIPP network could be summarized as the following. Firstly, a unified network with the common value to demand a free and fair election could be a key activity to delegitimize the Soeharto regime. Secondly, the active pre-existing connections and network of

activists meant that the movement could be organized underground under limitations and they were able to adapt themselves and develop new tactics and strategies. The public figures played an important role not only in establishing new networks, but also in pooling financial resources and building public trust. However, it must be noted that the students and young activist network were the main factors that mobilized people in the field, while at the same time they were ready to move to the forefront of the movement. Even though they had less experience, their strong enthusiasm and voluntary will were very crucial in a mass movement of that magnitude. And finally, the incorporation of engagement from media activists and publicly recognized human rights activists also increased the network's legitimacy towards its activities, public trust towards the network, and enhanced public acknowledgement of the unfair state's mechanism in its manipulated elections.

### Challenges under the Repressive Regime

In attempting to form the network under the Soeharto's rule, KIPP encountered different challenges at various stages. The major challenges at the early stage mostly were concentrated around direct and indirect intimidation and violation from the state authorities.

At the grass-roots level, the student activists at the time under Soeharto's government had to keep their movement underground due to the prohibition political activities in universities. The students had to use the strategies of making scattered study groups or organizing their discussion in non-formal ways. "Because activists at the time were heavily watched by the authorities, the civil movement and student movement became more risky, political talk and discussion, thus, took place in non-formal places such as coffee shops or students' residence" (Interview Agung Setidjono, 30 March 2018, Semarang). The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs<sup>5</sup> (NDI) has observed that because during the New Order era, the civil society or NGO groups, especially those that emerged during the 1990s, had to develop various strategies to avoid government interference, such as avoiding formal membership, retaining control and managing activities in a small group of individuals (NDI, 2000).

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<sup>5</sup> NDI started its support on citizen election monitoring group in the Philippines when NAMFREL organized a country-wide election monitoring in 1986. In Indonesian during 1996-1999, NDI supported KIPP (starting in 1996) and other two citizen election monitoring network, namely The University Network for Free Elections (UNFREL) and the Rector's Forum for Democracy (*Forum Rektor Indonesia*), with technical assistance on creating manuals and materials, providing technical experts, as well as helping the *Forum Rektor* to develop and implement the largest and most complex parallel vote tabulation to monitor elections on June 7, 1999.



Speaking of public figures, as Mulyana W. Kusumah became engaged in the key positions of the network, KIPP started to receive a lot of attention from the media, the public and donors. On the one hand, he enjoyed the media coverage and had interviews on the special report section through which KIPP was able to declare its neutral position to the public. For instance, an interview of Mulyana W. Kusumah appeared in special report column in GRATRA “*Bukan Ancaman Politik*” (Not a Threat to Politics). He stated KIPP was a non-partisan election monitoring group which called for honest (*jujur*) elections. It was not a threat to the political sphere, but a neutral moral movement, and the movement hoped to see a result in good government (GATRA, 1996).

Having strong ties with the media helped KIPP to be frequently visible in the public and counter the government’s attempt to delegitimize the existence of KIPP by announcing that KIPP is an illegal organization while accusing its Secretary General, Mulyana W. Kusumah, for being involved with the communist party or PKI (Hak Cipta Offstream Allied Media & YAPPIKA, 2002). However, the accusation of the leading figure still could not deter the public in their demand for fair elections and their involvement in the KIPP movement.

During the rule of Soeharto when political activists were at high risk, personal contacts and trust to recruit committed members were more important than having proper documentation of membership. This was explained that under the repressive regime, due to safety concerns, recruiting members through personal recommendations was frequently used without having any documentation. “As in Soeharto regime, it was dangerous to have a commitment (written) in paper. Such document could be used against us. Only trust to each other and commitment was enough for us” (Interview, Jojo Rohi, 9 March 2018, Jakarta).

As the public figures were the ones who took the role in increasing network and initiating ties with new groups, they also became the point persons for domestic and foreign donors who wanted to support the movement’s activities, such as NDI and the Institute for the Study of the Free Flow of Information (*Institut Studi Arus Informasi- ISAI*) (Interview, Goenawan Mohamad, 14 April 2018, Jakarta).

In terms of organization, as it is a nation-wide network, KIPP decided to decentralize its management. Especially during the suppressive time under Soeharto rule, KIPP was not recognized by the government and at the same time, its members and activities were being intimidated and threatened. “The principle values were made at the national level, while at the provincial level, the network groups created their movement independently”, explained by Jojo Rohi, one of KIPP initiators of East Java Chapter. He further added that “we must work like [an] underground movement and we had to be extra careful because the police, intelligence and army were watching us everyday, every minute. It was the hardest part of our movement... as one of the heads of KIPP East Java leaders, Herman Hendrawan<sup>6</sup>” was kidnapped by Prabowo –former military general and politician—... so we worked like a gamble. The work is our life and it is about how we can defend our life in the pressure situation” (Interview, Jojo Rohi, 9 March 2018, Jakarta)

In case of Herman Hendrawan’s disappearance, a report collected by Kohno (2003) showed that it was a result of the government’s attempt to get rid of democratic activists as many were connected to the Legal Aid Institution (LBH- *Lembaga Bantuan Hukum*) as lawyers and activists. In early 1998, nine student activists were kidnapped from the LBH office in Jakarta; all were tortured and freed, while two (including Herman Hendrawan) went missing. Because democratic activists at the time often had double or multiple affiliations, it directly affected KIPP since some of the activists who were arrested were also the main actors in the KIPP’s formation at the local chapters. This is similar to the government’s attempt in 1996, when a PRD activist was kidnapped in Yogyakarta. The said PRD activist was one of the people responsible for the formation of KIPP’s Yogyakarta Chapter. After being released, he decided to withdraw from the activist movement due to the fear of exposing other underground members to intimidation and arrests (Interview, Yul Amrozi, 5 April 2018, Jakarta).

Speaking of financial aspects, at the very early stage of the network’s formation, many local chapters and loose network that joined KIPP’s ideology were all self-funded. “Before receiving funding and support from international and domestic donors, we worked on voluntary basis by using personal financial support (Interview, Yul Amrozi, 5 April 2018, Jakarta). This became a challenge during the very early stage of the network’s formation. Knowing the limitation of their human and financial resources, their strategies were also limited, with no strong support even from the opposition political

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<sup>6</sup> “Herman Hendrawan, a student from Surabaya’s Airlangga University, was attending an activists’ meeting at the LBH office in Jakarta on March 12. He was missing after he left the LBH office, and never came back” (Kohno, 2003: 187).

parties, as he described, “We were well connected with the students but we were weak because the opposition party didn’t support us. Political parties here were always unreliable” (Goenawan Mohamad, 14 April 2018, Jakarta) but he insisted that the people’s movement should be organized.

However, afterwards KIPP started to receive financial support from foreign donors, mainly the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs<sup>7</sup> (NDI), to train volunteers and to set up local chapters to organize activities at the provincial level. KIPP local chapters conducted public trainings to train election-monitoring volunteers and advocate for public participation in politics.

Despite forming a new pro-democratic movement for free and fair elections in 1996, KIPP monitored the media coverage of political campaigns, election-related intimidation and violence prior to the 1997 elections. And though KIPP could not make a direct impact to the electoral system, it raised public awareness and focused the public’s attention to the problematic and flawed elections, and “these efforts made possible the later acceptance of citizen participation in the electoral process” (Bjornlund, 2004: 261).

After the fall of Soeharto in 1998 and when Indonesia’s political atmosphere became more open and freer, Indonesia witnessed a rapid increase of civil society groups working on broader issues and specific interests (Nugroho, 2009). In 1999, the idea of election monitoring from KIPP started to be recognized as other two citizen election monitoring groups were established: the Rectors’ Forum - (*Forum Rektor*) and the University Network for a Free and Fair Election (UNFREL). Both emerged from the university and campus-based network and were able to mobilize 220,000 and 96,000 volunteers respectively to monitor elections and develop a website to document and promote the activities (Hill, 2003; 530-531). In the wake of election monitoring in 1999, KPU- The Election Commission of Indonesia accredited more than 100 election monitoring groups to monitor the 1999 elections (Bjornlund, 2004: 263).

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<sup>7</sup> NDI started its support on citizen election monitoring group in the Philippines when NAMFREL organized a country-wide election monitoring in 1986. In Indonesian during 1996-1999, NDI supported KIPP (starting in 1996) and other two citizen election monitoring network namely The University Network for Free Elections (UNFREL) and the Rector’s Forum for Democracy (Forum Rektor Indonesia) with technical assistance on creating manuals and materials, providing technical experts, as well as to help the Forum Rektor to develop and implement the largest and most complex parallel vote tabulation to monitor elections on June 7, 1999.

### 3. Continuing Challenges after the Reformation Era

Despite the speedy growth of new NGOs, Eric Bjornlund, NDI Senior Associate and Regional Director for Asia, has pointed out that Soeharto's resignation took place in an abrupt manner, which left the civil society unprepared to capitalize on the opening of such opportunity (NDI, 2000). There were sudden changes in the socio-political atmosphere, the shift of foreign donors' sights to civic education and other themes, the decrease of public voluntarism, the internal weaknesses and challenges such as the inability or unwillingness to accommodate some new ideas and strategies (Interview, Pipit Rochijat Kartawidjaja, 18 February 2018, Jakarta), and the accountability of fund expenses (Bjornlund, 2004: 261). KIPP started to face more challenges internally in various aspects. As a broad picture, the concept of monitoring government's performance has become a major issue in Indonesian society during the *Reformasi* era. In 1998, student activists and scholars demanded total reform and the rule of law in order to remove the complex political hierarchy of authoritarian institutions which was designed by the Soeharto regime to diminish public political participation and gain control of the society (Dufseth, 2002 : 614)

The public demand and the international pressure for democratic transformation led to several legal reforms. In 1999, four political laws, Law No. 2/1999 on political parties, Law No. 3/1999 on general elections, Law No. 4/1999 on the composition of Indonesia's representative bodies (MPR, DPR, and DPRD), and Law No. 5/1999 on civil servants' membership in political parties, were endorsed by the People's Representative Council (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* -DPR).

The law mentioned above has increased civic engagement in politics and afforded new opportunity for the civil society to enter the formal political sphere such as KPU, Panwas/ BAWASLU and political parties. These changes were significantly appreciated by the Indonesian society. Mulyana W. Kusumah entered Panwaslu before being appointed as one of the KPU members at the national level during 2001-2007, being in charge of the election organizer team (Suara Pembaruan, 2013). Juri Ardiantoro was a National KPU member in 2012-2017 (former Chairperson of Jakarta KPU), while Hasyim Asy'ari, after being secretary presidium in KIPP Kudus chapter during 1998-1999, was selected as KPU member in Central Java in 2003 and continued his career in the electoral field until being selected as national KPU member 2017-2022. Herdensi, a former member of KIPP North Sumatera chapter in 2004-2013 who was also active in the Committee for Missing Persons and Victims

of Violence (*Komisi untuk Orang Hilang dan Korban Tindak Kekerasan- KONTRAS*), was selected to be the KPU Chairman in Medan (North Sumatera) during 2013-2018<sup>8</sup>. These are only a few names to be mentioned apart from other civil society members from other organizations. This shows that civic engagement in elections has paved the way for civil society to further contribute to the consolidation of democracy and political reform.

Looking back in KIPP network, after the 1999 election, the network wanted to increase its role, for example, through a parliamentary watch program, but “due to resistance from local parliamentary members, the program couldn’t be conducted well enough” (Interview, August Mellaz, 9 March 2018, Jakarta). Since 2004, its roles shifted to media monitoring and cooperation with KPU in public socialization programs while decreasing its role on election day monitoring.

Because the KIPP network was mostly comprised of young activists during the suppressive time of the *Order Baru*, many did not have the opportunity to explore and deepen their knowledge on the technical aspects of elections and politics. Moreover, the main challenges which KIPP encountered were its inability to adjust to the emerging needs and new strategies proposed by its members and its failure to cope with the political changes, such as to transform the network into research-based organisation, or working on more technical issues related to political reform (Interview, Juri Ardiantoro, 8 March 2018, Jakarta). Pipit Rochijat Kartawidjaja, former head of KIPP Europe and KIPP Germany chapter, after his return to Indonesia in 2002, expressed his disappointment with KIPP, “I gave them many materials I collected from Germany but they didn’t pay attention. They didn’t know what to do with those materials, such as mathematic elections, election formula about presidentialism, how parliament must be organized, and many more (Interview Pipit Rochijat Kartawidjaja, 18 February, 2018, Jakarta). He then became mentor for a newly formed organization *Sindikasi Pemilu dan Demokrasi* (SPD- Syndication of Elections and Democracy) which involved another former KIPP member, August Mellaz, from the East Java chapter.

With the decentralization of KIPP local chapters, the strategy which was used under the repressive time started to cause another problem for the network. As KIPP stopped receiving funding from foreign donors since after 2004 and relied mostly on donations from former members and small

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<sup>8</sup> See KPU Medan website <http://kpud-medankota.go.id/anggota-3/>. Retrieved on 24 June 2018.

project-based budget, KIPP at the national level did not hold any authority over its local chapters. Moreover, they encountered difficulty to consolidate network members from across the country, especially when reassessing the network's capacity and socio-political situation at hand. Without a national assembly and direct support from the national chapter for many years, local chapters began to close down while its members were only able to sustain the name and identity of KIPP local chapters without any operation (Interview, Agung Setidhono, 30 March 2018, Semarang).

At the present time and at the national level, KIPP still maintains its existence and roles in ensuring the protection of democratic process. The local chapters, however, could not maintain their existence for much longer. As in the case of Yogyakarta, the local chapter members tried to save the funding money received for election monitoring program in 1999 to be spent on office rental and its activities for the period of two years after (Interview, Alois Wisnuhardana, 3 April 2018, Jakarta). Unlike in the North Sumatera and West Java chapters, the current active members shared their resources, facility and affiliation with other local civil society groups in order to maintain their space to make critiques on political and electoral issues, as well as to nurture new generations to enter the political platform as an election monitoring group, hoping that this would pave the way for them to a higher level of roles and engagement in politics (Interview, Ferdiensyah Putra, 7 April, 2018, Medan)

Only during 13-15 January 2018, KIPP at the national level managed to organize a national congress, the previous one being in 2008 (due to financial constraints), in order to consolidate its members at the local chapter to discuss the future direction and to elect the new Chairperson and committee board. In the current era, KIPP still attempts to keep up its role in monitoring and criticizing the political and electoral issues. It maintains its main headquarters in Jakarta, while local chapters exist on a personal capacity and voluntary basis without any centralized authority. At the national level, KIPP is now reforming its internal organization, recruiting experts on elections and research and maintaining its coordination with other local civil society groups, especially when discussing and finding solutions for current electoral issues in Indonesia, such as money politics, identity politics, the involvement of civil society in elections, and electoral rules and regulations.

#### 4. Rethinking Civic Engagement in Consolidation of Democracy

In calling for political transition around the world, civil society has been one of the key players calling for the change. Diamond (1994:5) remarks that mass mobilization by the civil society network has led to democratization such as in South Korea, Taiwan, Chile, Poland, China and Czechoslovakia. Though political institutionalization is an urgent issue to consolidate democracy, the civil society's role too, is needed to help promote and consolidate democracy, because it includes constitutional reform and the promotion of social practices that contribute to democracy to become common practices of the society (Diamond, 1994: 15-16).

Tornquist (2002:565) states that the civil society should be strengthened in order to access and promote democratic rights, civic rights, and legal rights through institutional channels to create substantial democracy. The democratic means recommended by Tornquist are 1) free and fair elections in which government is open and accountable, 2) political rights, electoral rights, and legal rights which benefits and is accessible by all the people, and 3) social condition which allows these factors to happen. This, however, includes democratic government not only at the national level, but also at the local level and that the society will help form the broad democratic culture (ibid: 558).

In Indonesia, democratization started after the fall of Soeharto in 1998. Lussier and Fish (2012:70-84) commented that in Indonesia, the civil society played a vital role and engagement in the consolidation of democracy as Indonesia has a unique social pattern of citizens becoming members of organizations or of social and political groups at a much higher rate compared to other countries in Southeast Asia. By having a role in social or religious organizations, it helped people to practice management and negotiation skills and have influence towards local and national politics. It increased the opportunities for the citizens to be appointed and elected to high political positions. There is a higher potential to negotiate the relations of power with the elite groups as well as to maintain effective self-government.

But looking from another aspect, Tornquist (2003: 104-105) argued that decentralization in Indonesia is shallow as it allowed the local bosses to adapt to localized politics by creating ethnic and religious loyalties to win local positions and gain access to local resources and industries. Similarly, Freedman (2006: 105-106) observed the political reform and democracy in 1997 and saw that it was merely decisions made by the elite groups in former government, and elites in the civil society.

The Indonesian political situation can somehow prove that the insufficient direct public engagement of the citizens in the checks and balances system, such as election monitoring and continuous active civic-education programs at the grass-roots level, can result in the backsliding of democracy and political power being concentrated at certain institutions, such as the political parties or religious organizations. As the 2018 Democracy Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit has shown, Indonesia is moving from a flawed democracy towards a hybrid regime, slightly dropping to 6.39, while the political participation and political culture was rated 6.67 and 5.63 respectively.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the concerns on a few major issues such as identity politics, money politics, and religious politics are also rising.

I agree with Tornquist that even though two decades of the Reformation Era has passed, new challenges towards the consolidation of democracy continued to be witnessed due to the dynamic of politics and society. Therefore, the engagement of citizens in politics and elections, as well as civic culture should be strengthened and take deeper root in the society. The election monitoring by citizens is one of the ways for the voters to learn about democratic processes, and at the same time, being able to balance the power relations with other political stakeholders, as well as supporting the EMBs to administer the elections and increase the legitimacy of the vote results.

From the perspective of the EBM, BAWASLU organized a campaign called “One Million Election Monitoring Volunteers Movement” (*Gerakan Sejuta Relawan Pengawas Pemilu*) to recruit volunteers especially young people to be involved in election monitoring process. It aimed to increase informed voters, electoral integrity, public participation and to reduce election irregularities (Gunawan Sustantoro, 2015: 91-99); however the program still lacked sufficient number of expected volunteers.

The Secretary General of BAWASLU, Gunawan Sustantoro (interview, 13 April, 2018, Jakarta) has emphasized the fact that a citizen’s network such as KIPP could help to increase public participation and awareness in politics and elections. The checks and balances system between the civil society and government polity should be one of the key issues in a democratic country. He further commented

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<sup>9</sup> See The Economist Intelligence Unit, Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy, [http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy\\_Index\\_2018.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=Democracy2018](http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy_Index_2018.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=Democracy2018) . Access on 15 May 2019.



that “Democracy will be better if the civil society is in good condition. These election monitoring groups are needed to maintain the quality of democracy”.

The evidence of the decline of Indonesian democracy is being measured and used to prove that the top-down approach of legal and institutional reform is still insufficient to sustain and enhance the democracy. It may be the time we, not only Indonesians, but also in countries that are still facing authoritarian regimes, and those with democratic regimes, are reminded about continuation of civic engagement in political and electoral processes. Democracy also has the dynamic that requires support and engagement of all citizens. It is one of a few ways to maintain civic culture and to balance power relations between the government and the citizens.

## **Conclusion**

As we are aware that civil society engagement in politics is crucial, however, sometimes we are trapped in believing that having legal and institutional reform and free and fair elections is enough to call a country ‘democratic’, and we forget about means of civic engagement in politics and elections. If the government and civil society is able to address this issue, it will allow the democratic concept and practices to take a deeper root in the society. In the case of Indonesia, in the current political atmosphere which became more open and democratic, it allowed the civil society groups to expand their roles to work on broader issues of human rights. However, the civil society, as well as the government, must not forget to incorporate the engagement of citizens in electoral processes, especially as election monitors, as a way to nurture civic culture and to continue improving the quality of democracy. In the case of KIPP, it can still increase its capacity if it is able to restructure to attract public interest and increase the commitment of young people, while the network can benefit from former members who are now experts in political and electoral issues in terms of resources and information. In addition, the network needs to develop its movement strategy to become more suitable with the socio-political changes.

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